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The New Books

Belles Lettres

THE WORLD'S GREAT AGE. By Philo M. Buck, Jr. Macmillan. 1936. \$3.50.

This book consists of individual discussions of thirteen major figures of the nineteenth century from Rousseau to Hardy, and of four general chapters, and is intended as "interpretation." The century is characterized as "a century of search—a century adrift," and the book concludes in the manner of a bright lecturer that "doubtless we are again on the threshold of another century of search. Without the interest and the adventure, and the attending danger, life would be a drab affair indeed." Which is extremely true or not, depending on how you look at it.

The nineteenth century "a century adrift"? Not in the eyes of Huxley, Leo XIII, Karl Marx, de Maistre, Comte, Gumpowicz, Haackel, Herbert Spencer, or Bismarck, each of whom was absolutely certain of his certainty. Never was a century which so worshipped universal law. Mr. Buck makes out a case for "a century adrift" only by concentrating on a few figures. It is true, he is in good company. Brandes read the century in terms of triumphant liberalism; Mario Praz has recently exhibited it as one hundred years of morbid sensibility; and M. Léon Daudet has referred unkindly to the stupid nineteenth century.

Mr. Buck is equally partial. He dismisses Goethe, whose "Faust" is probably the representative poem of the epoch, as typifying an age that had closed, and welcomes Rousseau, who died in 1778 when "Werther" was four years old, because with him begins "our new age." There are some good things in his volume, such as his exhumation of Manzoni and

his discussion of Hebbel, but the book seems intended for college juniors, and has the exasperating atmosphere of brilliant obviousness which goes with teaching babes in grace their grammar.

Never was a style so clumsy. Mr. Buck writes English as if it were a foreign language. Unless the volume results from taking down lectures in shorthand, we are at a loss to account for the extraordinary blunders. Sentences without verbs, ambiguous references of pronouns, confusions of tenses, mixed figures of speech—all the blunders which one tries to iron out of undergraduate compositions are distressingly abundant; and even when the author is grammatically correct, his syntax is confused and awkward. A single instance must serve. Mr. Buck's summary of the plot of "La Nouvelle Héloïse" concludes: "And the story ends with all romantically purged, all that are left alive, and purified." This, as Alice said, is certainly English, but it makes no sense. Mr. Buck should have meditated long before publishing this manuscript.

H. M. J.

Fiction

HOMAGE TO BLENHOLT. By Daniel Fuchs. Vanguard. 1936. \$2.50.

This is a vague blending of burlesque, lyricism, and satire, neither value dominant enough to give the book character and each cancelling the others out. The result is blurred, like a camera shot unfocussed. For instance, there is a great deal of material in this novel of Jews in Williamsburg that is broad burlesque, a kind of deceptive surface realism that makes the most of dialect, appearance, gesture, tragi-comic emotionalism. It is as shallow as it is funny, in the vein al-

Over the Counter

The Saturday Review's Guide to Current Attractions

Trade Mark	Label	Contents	Flavor
RINGS ON HER FINGER Laurence Kirk (Doubleday, Doran: \$2.)	Novel	Prancing Filly, taught by her genial old man that the badger game pays heavy dividends, pulls her punches on intended victim when she ups and finds herself in,—yep, in love.	Foxy
CHILD OF EVIL Octavus Roy Cohen (Appleton-Century: \$2.)	Novel	Small town goes boom-town and gents of diverse rackets move in. Sweet gal falls in clutches of gambler but this time dice roller gets it good and in the back.	Smart Cohen
THERE'S ONLY ONE Sophia Kerr (Farrar-Rinehart: \$2.)	Novel	A terrific yen to find out who and what her real maw is brings to Rachel an amazing adventure and the realization that the foster matter is really the tops.	Teary
THE VANISHING IDOL George Gibbs (Appleton-Century: \$2.)	Romantic Adventure	All we know is what we read in the book. Round-the-world folk stop at Angkor and presto,—the Emerald Buddha disappears. Well, the Hindus don't like and a jolly time is had by all.	Shaggy

ready exploited by Mr. Arthur Kober. Having chosen this approach, Mr. Fuchs asks us to take seriously the Hamlet-like introspections and vagaries of his hero, who seeks a better life. Of course the concept falls through. It is not against such a slapstick background that a legend of man's hunger in his youth can be unfolded. The young man himself, to make matters more difficult, is incredibly silly, and we can only agree with the judgments of the supposedly soulless folk about him. What then? If Mr. Fuchs meant to write a satire he has obscured his purpose, since neither hero nor background is genuine enough to judge the other by. It seems more likely that he was of many minds about his materials, and did not make the necessary decision.

N. L. R.

THE WORLD OVER. By Edith Wharton.
Appleton-Century. 1936. \$2.

One gets much the same pleasure from Mrs. Wharton's stories as from W. Somerset Maugham's. They are told with a precision and intelligence which are a pleasure to encounter. They are not deep—in this book, at least—but they are dramatic; if occasionally melodramatic, none the less entertaining. Her elderly society ladies from New York and Boston are familiar characters: so much the better, as this focusses the attention on the story ideas. And the ideas are good ones: a perpetual poor relation becomes the most important person in the family by virtue of living to be a hundred; a young man traveling in Europe falls in love with a girl who had once been tried for murder; an Irish masseuse brightens the life of a client by pretending to bring spirit messages. A younger generation of story-writers has turned to plotlessness and often to pointlessness. Mrs. Wharton's new book reminds us that there is much to be said for construction and good story-telling, even when they do not produce an "Ethan Frome."

G. S.

Travel

AERIAL ODYSSEY. By E. Alexander Powell. Macmillan. 1936. \$2.50.

When a man visits two dozen countries in half as many weeks, and writes a book telling about them, the work is approached with grave suspicion and deep misgivings. In general, no man is capable of writing about a country unless he has lived there at least a year and made a sincere effort to become a part of its life. Yet E. Alexander Powell, in "Aerial Odyssey," made the entire circuit of the Caribbean by airplane, stopping only a few days in each of the capitals, and his book is not the mere superficial record that he himself in his preface says it must inevitably be. This is because Col. Powell is an experienced and expert traveler.

His book stands out as one in which information and entertainment are never out of step. His smooth, easy style is almost conversational, and he leaves the reader feeling that they have been fellow travelers on the trip, which ranged from Cuba and Haiti to South America and Mexico. It is an unusual performance in its consummate ease and graphic effect.

R. B.

The Living Jefferson

by James Truslow Adams

"Splendidly written . . . sound historically . . . fair and outspoken in its findings. Mr. Adams is to be thanked for an interesting and authoritative history." *Boston Transcript*. \$3.00

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and is conducted by John T. Winterich*

100 Nonesuch Books

THE NONESUCH CENTURY. London, 1936. 42 s. New York: Random House, 1936.

FOR a dozen years booklovers here and in England have anticipated and welcomed the volumes put forth under the publishing imprint of The Nonesuch Press. A great variety of titles has been accompanied by a great diversity of typographic format and binding, and this diversity has included many books which possessed that peculiar quality of appropriateness and charm which is of the essence of good book making. "The Week-End Book" is a familiar example: the edition with the English title-page being a very charming, witty, and companionable book which is at the same time a good piece of printing.

The present volume is a summary and history of the accomplishments of the Press since its foundation, including a list of the hundred volumes which its proprietors, Francis Meynell, Vera Meynell, and David Garnett, have issued. A "short title catalogue" of the hundred is followed by numerous examples of title-pages, text pages, and bindings, and preceded by two essays on the work of the Press. The first is an "Appraisal," by A. J. A. Symons, of the condition of British printing at the time the Press was established, and of its issues since then. It is written with the same amusing insularity which marred his essay on nineteenth century printing in the last volume of the *Fleuron*, an insularity which ignores entirely the work of Mr. Rogers at the Riverside Press (work as diverse in content and format as that of Nonesuch, and all done before Nonesuch started in) and in fact all cis-Atlantic printing. In fact it is not very interesting, and only mildly informative.

Mr. Meynell's essay, "The Personal Element," is, on the contrary, a delightfully intimate account of the personnel and progress of the Press. It is written with a light touch, humorously, and with enough detail to enable one to enjoy with the author the triumphs and tribulations of the years. There are brilliant flashes in it—as when he summarizes that master-advertiser Lawrence of Arabia in one inimitable story.

The book is, of course, well gotten up. It is a folio, printed in a good font of roman type on thick paper, and stoutly bound. Indexes of artists and decorators, and of type faces, a bibliography, and reproductions of devices and bindings make it useful and scholarly. Perhaps the only flaw is that the size of non-limited editions is not given.

The Nonesuch Press is not a printing concern: its books have been printed by various English printing-offices always under the careful eye of Mr. Meynell. He has used without affectation whatever type face or paper he found suitable to

his purpose, and the Press has employed numerous decorators to embellish pages or jackets. The examples (of practically every one of the hundred books) display an ingenuity in typography which is astonishing, and, such is the skill with which Mr. Meynell has done his work, usually pleasing—sometimes very charming. He has worked in many styles (save the Gothic), but with a free hand. The result is modern printing of the best kind, free from affectation and pose.

As a record of the work of one of the important modern publishing houses this volume will prove interesting reading to all book collectors, even the most non-technical, and it is important in the history of printing. Merely as a picture book of title-pages and typographic designs and decorative illustrations it is a book to be read with delight, and absorbed by every book-producer who respects his craft.

A Limited Editions Club Issue

FITZGERALD: THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KHAYYAM. New York. 1935.

The Limited Editions Club is seven years old, and it has never before issued the Rubaiyat! Such heroic restraint is unknown among publishers of limited editions: having so nobly resisted the first temptation of all publishing houses, Mr. Macy should be permitted his one indiscretion! He has spared no pains with the book. It is a very small octavo, printed on soft Japan paper, in several colors, the text (in a lovely italic with roman capitals) being printed within broad, elaborately designed borders. Mr. Valenti Angelo has done a remarkable piece of work in these decorations as well as in his pictures in the style of the miniaturist. The book is intended to be a gem: the only reason it just fails to be is the use of too much yellow in the tint beneath the borders and in the binding. It all looks a bit jaundiced. The type work, the printing, and the paper would have been enough to make as pleasant an edition of the Rubaiyat as has come out in a long while.

Notes

THE BOOK OF ESTHER. New York. 1935.

Designed by Valenti Angelo, and printed by Hawthorn House. An unpretentious but attractive little book with nice decorative qualities.

LILIAN AMES FABLES. Mt. Vernon, N. Y. 1935.

From the Golden Eagle Press. Has about all the faults possible. The type is too small for the page, the paper is too assertive (though of excellent quality), the margins are bad, the title-page is out of scale: a badly handled book whose contents are worthy of better treatment.